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CIRM SOLICITS MAJOR FACILITIES GRANT APPLICATIONS

\$227 million available for new stem cell labs

SAN FRANCISCO, August 24, 2007 – Early next year, the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) will award its largest grants ever. Today the state's stem cell agency began soliciting applications for \$227 million, for the construction of new laboratories at non-profit and academic research institutions.

A key aspect of the CIRM Scientific Strategic Plan is the investment in research facilities that are needed to support CIRM's objectives. The Plan states that facilities will be needed to both accommodate the increase in researchers engaged in stem cell research in California as a result of CIRM's research grant and training programs, and to provide research space that can be used for stem cell research that would otherwise not be available due to restrictions imposed by the federal government.

The Request for Applications (RFA) for Major Facilities Grants released today will support the establishment of new facilities for stem cell programs that encompass a portion or the full spectrum of research that will lead from discovery to development and testing of cures, therapies, diagnostics and technologies. The application has two parts. Part One will address the breadth and depth of the stem cell research program at the applicant institution(s) and the relationship of the proposed major research facility to the program. If approved in the review of Part One, applicants will be invited in Part Two to address the technical aspects of their building programs to ensure that they align with CIRM's objectives, and that California taxpayers receive good value for the public funds invested in projects.

The objectives of the Major Facilities Grants are:

- Funding new facilities – and encouraging investments by others in new facilities – that are free of any federal funding so as to allow research and development of therapies based on human embryonic stem cell (hESC) and other stem cell approaches to proceed in California without restrictions imposed by the federal government.
- Developing stem cell research centers that will expand research capacity and capabilities in California while bringing hESC-related researchers together in a collaborative setting.
- Funding new facilities and improvements where research institutions have determined that existing facilities are inadequate or are lacking altogether and thus pose a challenge to the development of therapies and cures for diseases being addressed at these institutions.

Part One of the application will be reviewed by the CIRM Grants Working Group (GWG) for scientific merit of the applicant's stem cell research program and its relationship to the proposed facility. Part Two of the application will be reviewed by the Institute's Facilities Working Group (FWG) for the technical and financial merit of the proposal. Both reviews are based on criteria adopted by CIRM's governing body, the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC).

The 15 scientists of the GWG will evaluate Part One applications for the breadth and depth of the applicant's stem cell research program and its relationship to the proposed facility. Applicant institutions may compete in any or all of the following scientific elements: basic and discovery research; preclinical (translational) research; and preclinical development and clinical research. These scientific elements represent the breadth of an institution's program. Each element will be evaluated for its quality and depth in four key areas: (1) scientific program; (b) formal partnerships; (c) core services and (d) plans for growth. Each element will be independently assessed and scored reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of that element.

Following the scoring of all elements independently by the scientific reviewers, the full membership of the GWG will conduct a programmatic review of all Part One applications. The GWG will recommend to the ICOC whether the applicant is meritorious for funding in all or some of the elements in which it chooses to compete.

The ICOC will review the recommendations of the GWG and decide which elements of each application merit funding. The ICOC will assign successful applicants to a category for Major Facilities Grants, and these institutions will be invited to submit Part Two of the application for funding in their assigned category. There are three categories:

- **CIRM Institutes:** funding for capital project proposals that support the most comprehensive stem cell research programs, with individual grants ranging from \$25-50 million;
- **CIRM Centers of Excellence:** funding for capital project proposals with broad but somewhat less comprehensive stem cell research programs, with individual grants ranging from \$10-25 million; and
- **CIRM Special Programs:** funding for capital project proposals that support specialized stem cell research programs, with individual grants ranging from \$5-10 million.

The FWG will review the Part Two applications and determine a score for each based on criteria established by the ICOC. The scores will be the basis for recommended funding to be decided by the ICOC in its final review of the Major Facilities Grant applications.

CIRM objectives include prompting additional facilities investments in addition to CIRM grant funds. Applicants will be required to provide matching funds equal to at least 20 percent of the CIRM grant amount. Additional project funding beyond the matching amount will be considered “leverage” funds.

Award of a Major Facilities Grant will have a downstream effect on an institution’s allowable costs for subsequent CIRM research grants. Costs already provided by a facilities grant will not be considered allowable costs in a CIRM research grant.

The Major Facilities Grant RFA is available at <http://www.cirm.ca.gov/grants/default.asp>. Interested institutions must submit letters of intent by September 26, 2007. Part One applications are due October 16, 2007. The deadline for submission of Part Two applications will be determined and announced in January 2008. The ICOC is expected to approve the CIRM Major Facilities Grants in April 2008.

About CIRM

Governed by the ICOC, the CIRM was established in 2004 with the passage of Proposition 71, the California Stem Cell Research and Cures Initiative. The statewide ballot measure, which provided \$3 billion in funding for stem cell research at California universities and research institutions, was approved by California voters, and called for the establishment of an entity to make grants and provide loans for stem cell research, research facilities, and other vital research opportunities. The CIRM is the largest source of funding for human embryonic stem cell research in the world. To date, grants totaling more than \$208.5 million have been approved by the ICOC. For more information, please visit www.cirm.ca.gov.

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